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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

August 2, 2018

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The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington DC, 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

Thanks again for your visit to Oregon last month to both Sherman County and the site of the Eagle Creek Fire. Oregon again finds itself in the middle of another terrible fire year. Fires from one end of the state to the other have consumed over 250,000 acres already. Sadly, the very wheat farm we visited in Sherman County, and many of their neighbors, recently lost some or all of their crops to fire. The state of Oregon has requested a disaster declaration, and your prompt consideration and approval of that request would be appreciated. Farmers and ranchers affected by the fire have also told me that USDA could greatly assist them in dealing with this disaster by both authorizing emergency grazing on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) ground, and by ensuring Risk Management Agency (RMA) gives flexibility to summer fallow producers who utilize cover crop this year for emergency soil stabilization. I ask that you ensure the USDA Farm Service Agency and RMA act promptly to provide this needed relief.

A major concern following the fire is the threat of soil erosion. USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service has offered EQIP funds to help with emergency cover cropping to stabilize these soil. Farmers who want to use these programs and tools are concerned, however, that doing so will place them into the continuous production category with RMA and affect their crop insurance in the out years. I urge you to work with producers and RMA to ensure they are not negatively impacted for taking these important soil protection measures.

Many of the wheat farms in the area affected by fire are also livestock producers and have lost pasture to the fire. With available CRP ground nearby that was unaffected by the fire, allowing emergency grazing would be a help to those looking to replace lost forage. I ask you to use your authority to allow these emergency grazing to take place.

Outside the Columbia Gorge, fires are also burning across southwestern Oregon, devastating public and private land, and choking our communities with smoke. Overgrown forests fuel these catastrophic fires. I appreciate your leadership as we passed into law additional tools, and a fix to fire borrowing, earlier this year. These are an important step towards preventing fire, but more work remains. The House passed Farm Bill includes several additional provisions to further improve forest management and reduce the threat of fire. Your leadership would be welcome in ensuring we keep these important provisions in the final 2018 Farm Bill.

Oregon's farmers, ranchers and foresters are facing significant challenges during this fire season. I appreciate your prompt attention to these important issues so that Oregon's rural communities can better navigate through the disasters they have faced.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. Walden', is positioned above the printed name.

Greg Walden
Member of Congress